

APPENDIX 4: ACIAR POLICY STATEMENT ON BIOTECHNOLOGY

ACIAR endorses the use of biotechnology (including genetic engineering) as a valid tool in the quest for improved global food security and for reducing the environmental footprint of terrestrial food production. It can potentially make a significant contribution to characteristics needed in crops produced in developing countries. Such characteristics include increased crop yields and tolerance to stresses; improved processing, and postharvest quality and storage life; and improved nutritional quality. Engineered herbicide resistance in crops can also reduce labour costs, while the introduction of insect tolerance can bring farmer health and environmental benefits through reduced insecticide requirements.

ACIAR recognises that crop genetic engineering is not a 'silver bullet'; rather, it is one of a set of approaches in the development of improved crop varieties. ACIAR will support genetically modified approaches on a case-by-case basis for the manipulation of traits that are of major importance but are unable to be modified efficiently by conventional plant breeding.

Collaborative projects involving genetically modified organisms (GMOs) will be initiated at the specific request of the particular ACIAR partner country. Proposed projects involving GMOs will be in keeping with the outcome of formal consultations with, or the agreed priorities of, the partner country. Before agreement to collaborate, approval of relevant government policymakers and regulatory authorities (as well as the research partners) must be secured.

Technologies will be developed and tested only in countries where effective biosafety, regulatory and enforcement systems for the use of the GMOs are in force. These systems will be established before research commences and will address risks to the environment, human health and food safety. They will also be in keeping with federal laws and regulations in Australia (*Gene Technology Act 2000*) and the partner countries, as well as relevant international conventions, including the Convention on Biological Diversity. Before collaborative research can commence, the Australian Government requires that biosafety systems are in place that satisfy s.160 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The EPBC Act is the Australian Government's central piece of environmental legislation. It also applies to work funded by the aid program and carried out overseas, and may apply to some Australian domestic research. The EPBC Act states that, unless funding agencies are assured that there is no significant environmental risk from project operations, they are required to obtain advice and, if necessary, approval from the Commonwealth Environment Minister before the project can proceed.

ACIAR is committed to collaboration with partners and links with extension systems to ensure that improved varieties and technologies are disseminated. Impact pathways are just as important for the subsequent adoption of genetically modified crop technologies as for the products of conventional plant breeding.